

# Freeethought

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED RATIONALIST MONTHLY

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CASTE SYSTEM HAS IN MY OPINION A SCIENTIFIC BASIS—Mr. M. K. Gandhi

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God is a myth; immortality an illusion; Religion, a gigantic fraud

# Letters

I take this opportunity to request you to consider my case for becoming a member of the Indian Rationalist Association so that I, in my own small way, can further the noble cause pursued by Dr. Kovoov and all other rationalists.

Tilak Mukherji,  
Rajasthan.

## DAWOODI BOHRAS, A MUSLIM SECT

Sir:—Kudos to your magazine for its relentless battle against superstition and exploitation which goes on under the garb of religion.

Religion has truly become a money-making racket. Take for instance the religious Head of the Dawoodi Bohra Community. Syedna Saheb, as he is called, wields an iron rod over our community. The Dawoodi Bohra community is one million strong and is scattered all over India and abroad. The Syedna Saheb, with the help of his religious position, exploits us to the fullest extent. He collects an income of Rs. 12 crores a year from our community by way of various taxes. This money which should be spent for the community's welfare, finds its way into Syedna Saheb's pockets. He lives a life of unparalleled luxury.

Any Dawoodi Bohra raising his voice against this injustice is immediately socially boycotted by the order of the Syedna Saheb. The grave social and economic consequences of social-boycott on a Bohra deters many a brave Bohra from hurling a brick at the Syedna Saheb.

And thus the exploitation goes on—the Syedna Saheb, with his henchmen, all-powerful and undeterred, in his merciless job of money-making in the name of religion.

Yasine Contractor,  
Bombay

## SCIENTIFIC WAY

Sir:—For long I have been exposed to the controversies concerning the mystical, super-natural and super-human aspects of our existence vis-a-vis the logical, rational and the scientific.

I have always held Dr. Kovoov in high esteem, because I am one who holds that the only basis to life is science and logic.

## RATIONALIST WAY OF DISPOSING DEAD

Sir:—At the time of my second attack, I have pronounced my firm and irrevocable desire that my dead body should immediately be handed over to any hospital which can take out from it whatever organs could be found useful and the remains be handed over to my wife Dr. Sudha Saraiya and Son Yash, who should neither bury it (I have been born in Bohra (Muslim) Sect), nor cremate it (my wife being Vaishnav Hindu) but should submerge it in deep sea so that the remains may serve as useful food to sea creatures.

Please advise me of any other precaution I should now take so that my desire be fully implemented. I have cherished these convictions as an Atheist since I came in contact with Mr. Kamalashanker Pandya in 1935/36.

Y. A. Lokhandwala,  
Bombay

## FREETHOUGHT

Sir:—Month after month FREE-THOUGHT is improving and creating greater enthusiasm to go through it. I appreciate the interest evinced by the concerned to bring out the magazine with novel ideas. I hope the rationalist outlook will catch up fast.

Ch. Brahmalingaswara Rao,  
Paduru

Sir:—I am a new reader of FREE-THOUGHT. The contents are delicious! Let FREE-THOUGHT be forever!

C. G. Charles, Trivandrum

# Free thought

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## THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

"On January 26, 1950 we will have equality in politics and inequality in social and economic life. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest moment or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy."

—B. R. AMBEDKAR

## HARASSED 'HARIJANS'

We are passing through a critical phase in our social relations, thanks to the devilry of the 'upper' castes. The Swamijis, Babas and Priests have made a common cause with influential politicians and landlords. On the one hand religious preachings are doled out to us as the panacea for all evils haunting the individual and the society, and on the other hand physical liquidation of persons who dare protest against caste oppression is taking place.

What happened on 27th May, 1977 at Belchchi in Bihar where 11 persons (mostly Harijans) were brutally murdered and burnt by Kurmis (land owning community) is not an isolated instance. In rural India the landlords are a law unto themselves. The Belchchi Kurmis appear to have braved a Parliamentary Mission's findings that the killings were the result of assertion of caste superiority. A sense of equality displayed by a Harijan youth cost him his life and that of his companions. The impression of the Mission was that the local police and magistracy have been swayed by money power and caste affiliations. But the

Chief Minister and the Union Home Minister (both incidentally Kurmis themselves) have chosen to appoint a new enquiry committee.

The lessons to be drawn are obvious. The backward classes whether they are tribals or 'Harijans' cannot hope to get justice from the existing social order based on social and economic exploitation. Nor such leaders as Gandhi who in the same breath propagated religion and also pretended to promote upliftment of the oppressed classes could improve the situation.

The humiliation being suffered

by the oppressed classes (so-called Harijans) can be ended only by enlightened 'Harijans' leading a revolt for a total change in the existing order. Appeasement in the form of crumbs of office being thrown at the more vocal sections of the community should be utilised to fight for a total change of the present social and economic order (this latter is equally—if not more important than the former). They should assert their rights and their strength instead of relying on the good-nature of a few in the 'upper' castes. They will have to form the vanguard of the revolution to come as they have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

## CASTE MALAISE

Any social scientist finds caste an enigma and a source of despair. Whence its viability that it can withstand the onslaught of momentous scientific and technological developments?

We are told that caste is not part of the core of Hindu religion, that it was a convenient device, and that, as conceived earlier, it possessed considerable resilience. What is not well publicised is that religious leaders like Sankaracharya (there are many

such) are only the heads of particular caste groups and perpetuate casteism. Nor can we expect political leaders, elected mainly on caste considerations to abolish the very source of their power. Nor will the conservative judiciary and bureaucracy selected mainly through nepotism and caste considerations act to the detriment of caste. Any industrial or business house being the result of a few individuals' efforts cannot but be dominated by a particular caste.

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# UNTOUCHABILITY

V. T. RAJSHEKAR SHETTY

Political parties have vied with each other in showing lip sympathy for Harijans, in expressing concern at the continuing practice of untouchability and in deploring the growing atrocities against them in rural areas. Occasions such as the Ambedkar Jayanti are used to unveil his statues and portraits and name roads after him.

The untouchables have been silent spectators of the yearly ritual. After renaming them Harijans (men of god), Gandhi agitated for temple entry, common wells and interdining and even adopted some Harijan children. He lived in "bhangi" colonies and called for removal of untouchability. But, did he succeed in removing it from India?

## CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

The Constitution gives a statutory assurance that untouchability is abolished. Its observance in any form is made a punishable offence. But, even after 26 years the problem persists. The Government of India brought forward a sterner measure on November 19, 1976. That day the Protection of Civil Rights Act carrying a more deterrent punishment for offences under untouchability came into force. It provided for higher fines and longer periods of punishment. Even preaching of untouchability has now become an offence under this Act.

## HALF-HEARTED MEASURES

No doubt the campaign against untouchability has the backing of a strict constitutional provision and a gamut of legal sanctions against its observance. Reservations of seats in Legislatures and the Parliament, reserved posts in Government services and undertakings and also in educational institutions, liberal scholarship and a number of ameliorative measures have altered the position very little, particularly in rural areas where apartheid in its most blatant form continues unabated.

## THE CASTE PYRAMID

Can laws alone remove an essentially social problem? Like so many other evils that stalk Indian society, untouchability is a by-product of an exploitative system and the ultimate cure lies only in a transformation of the socio-economic set-up.

What then is the basic issue? Untouchability is a problem that has come down



the centuries as part of our four-fold chaturvarna (caste system): Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. The untouchables are called 'panchamas' because they are outside the caste system. Hence, they are aptly called the outcastes. Being at the bottom of the caste pyramid they are the last and the lowliest, socially the meanest and economically the poorest. Their very touch or even a look leads to pollution.

At the bottom, the untouchables form the base of this pyramid carrying the weight of the entire society. Above their shoulders and back we find the vast number of shudras who in turn carry the Vaishyas. Above them stand the Kshatriyas. It is the Brahmin who stands at the top and forms the apex of this caste pyramid. He carries none and hence enjoys all the freedom to manoeuvre his body and use his mind.

### CASTE, THE QUINTESSENCE

Such a hierarchical caste pyramid is something unique, unheard of in any other part of the world. The caste system is the quintessence of the Hindu genius.

It is clear from this that untouchability is in-built within the caste system which in turn is the foundation on which the edifice of Hindu religion rests. What will happen if the untouchables forming the base of this caste pyramid are to shake their body? Will not the entire super-structure tremble and collapse? The one occupying the topmost place (Brahmin) will be the worst sufferer in this mighty fall. The others are also sure to be wounded. So, who is prepared to risk this fall? Therefore, any attempt by the

ones at the bottom to topple the caste scaffolding will be resisted by those standing above them. Self-preservation is an inborn human instinct. This well-knit caste pyramid has helped preserve the hierarchical order and the pleasures and pains that go with it: an ascending order of reverence and a descending degree of contempt.

### GANDHI SUPPORTED CASTE

It must now be clear that untouchability being a part of the caste system will really

### SHUDRAS AND SCRIPTURES

While debarring the Shudras from attaining knowledge and education, Shankara argues:—"The Shudras are not qualified to study scriptures for the Smritis prohibit their hearing the Veda, their studying the Veda and their understanding and performing vedic rites". The prohibition of hearing the vedas is conveyed by the following passages: (1) "The ears of him who hears the vedas are to be filled with molten lead and lac", (2) "For a Shudra is like a cemetery, therefore, the veda is not to be read in the vicinity of a Shudra"; (3) "His tongue is to be slit if he pronounces it, his body is to be cut through if he preserves it"; and (4) "He (the Brahmana teacher) is not to impart knowledge to the Shudra" and only "to the twice born belong study"<sup>1</sup>.

Prof S. K. S. Ajnat  
 1The Brahma Sutra—1.3.88

disappear only when the caste system goes. GANDHI ONLY OPPOSED UNTOUCHABILITY BUT NOT THE CASTE SYSTEM. 'Gandhi believed in caste and defended it with the vigour of the orthodox', said Dr. Ambedkar (Annihilation of Caste—Page 127) and added: "The reason why the 'Mahatma' is always supporting caste and the "varna" is because he is afraid that if he opposed them he will lose his place in politics" (Ibid—page 129).

The Constitution abolished only untouchability, not the caste system. On the other hand, the Constitution has encouraged castes giving them a legal sanction. The Courts have also upheld this in several judgements.

### ATTEMPTS AT CASTE ABOLITION

If untouchability cannot go without abolishing caste, how are we to destroy this caste system? Several attempts have been made right from the days of the Mahavira and the Buddha—over 2,500 years ago. Dr. Ambedkar too gave deep thought on the subject and finally gave up, renouncing Hindu religion itself and embracing the atheistic Buddhism along with thousands of his "Mahar" followers. Several social reformers too tried to attack the caste system but all of them failed including men like Basavanna, Narayana Guru, Vivekananda and Periyar Ramaswamy Naicker. Gandhi too, casually attacked caste system and instantly fell a victim to a Brahmin bullet.

### 'J P' FAILS TO COMPREHEND

The latest to join this centuries-old futile battle against the caste system is Jayaprakash Narayan. In his broadcast

to the nation on April, 13, 1977 the Loknayak said: "The caste system among the Hindus is a glaring example of our evil inheritance. From the time of the Lord Buddha and may be even earlier times, attempts have been made to destroy the hierarchical system of caste but it still flourishes in every part of the country".

Unfortunately, people like JP, who with all good intentions carry on a battle against the caste system, have failed to understand its meaning, its connotations and denotations.

### WHAT IS HINDUISM?

The caste system, on which some 3,500 books have been written by foreign and Indian authorities, is the bedrock on which Hindu religion is built. And this great religion means a lot of things to a lot of people. Chiefly it includes:

1. The entire Scriptures—the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas and the Laws of Manu, all written, codified, interpreted and guided solely by a hereditary priestly class who do no wrong and hence are universally acclaimed as the "Bhudevatas"—gods of the earth.

2. The theory of "Karma" and rebirth, the philosophy of "Maya" a whole set of unalterable customs and practices, superstitions, myths, morals, dogmas, rites, rituals, ceremonies, duties, habits, traditions, prejudices, precedents, penances, sins, faiths, vows, caste marks, evil spirits, human worship, sacred trees and stones.

3. The 33 crores of gods and goddesses in the Hindu pantheon and the system of "Jagadgurus" and "Swamijis" who preside over holy "Pithas" and "mutts" and the

hundreds of such godmen represented by Satya Sai Baba and the like.

4. The millions of temples that dot the length and breadth of this holy land and the priests that thrive on their income.

All these together constitute, Hinduism, one of the largest religions in the world. Even astrology, palmistry, witchcraft and sorcery are considered part of Hinduism.

### NO HINDUISM WITHOUT CASTE

And this religion is built on the firm foundation of the caste system. There is no Hindu without a caste and no caste without Hinduism and the entire value system that it represents. Minus the caste, Hinduism is dead.

Will the existing Sankaracharyas tolerate any attempt to cut at the very root of Hindu religion? Are the hereditary priests ready to give up their lucrative business? Who is prepared to destroy those Scriptures that have held Hindus 'enthralled'?

### ABOLISH HINDUISM!

The eradication of untouchability is an impossibility under the existing social conditions. As long as Hinduism continues, the caste system will also continue. People who advocate abolition of untouchability and go gaga over the Ambedkar Jayanti do not know what they are talking about. Or, they are just following others by recommending a cosmetic treatment for a disease that needs surgical operation. □

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## FIRE WALKING—NO MYSTERY

By Mr. S. K. MISHRA

It is believed that the deeds of fire-walkers can only be called mysterious. This is far from the truth. The deeds of the fire walkers can be explained scientifically. Water-drops at very high or low temperature turn into spheroids and these are non-conductors of heat. The water which sticks on the soles of the feet forms a protective non-conductive layer at that high temperature and the man walks without being hurt.

This can also be demonstrated in your kitchen. Take a clean iron plate, put it on a gasburner and heat it up sufficiently. Drop a few drops of water slowly from the side so that it rolls down to the centre. You would be surprised to see that a drop of water takes over five minutes to evaporate. Repeat the experiment on a moderately-heated iron plate and observe the water evaporate in less than 15 seconds.

Ask these miracle men to wipe their feet dry and then step on the coal. They won't. Ask them not to wash their feet before the return journey, and they won't walk. Ask them to walk on much less hot coal—not red hot—and they won't.

Courtesy: SUNDAY



# GANDHI, A FANATIC HINDU

Dr. B. R. AMBEDKAR

(Reproduced below are two very small chapters from Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Book 'Gandhi and Gandhism' published by Bheem Patrika Publications. Their relevance today when Gandhism is sought to be resurrected need not be over-emphasized—Ed.)

## WAR FOR FREEDOM OR FOR POWER

What does Mr. Gandhi propose to do after he gets his victory over the British? Does he propose to use the freedom he hopes to get to make the Untouchables free or will he allow the freedom he gets to be used to

endow the Hindu with more power than they now possess, to hold the Untouchables as their bondsmen? Will Mr. Gandhi and the Hindus establish a New Order or will they be content with rehabilitation of the traditional Hindu India, with its castes and its Untouchability, with its denial of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity? It is only answers to such questions which will enable us to know whether Mr. Gandhi's war is a war for freedom or a war for power.

## INEQUALITY, A DOCTRINE OF HINDUISM

These questions are not merely pertinent and legitimate, they are also necessary. The reason is obvious to those who know the Hindus. The Hindus have an innate and inveterate conservatism and they have a religion which is incompatible with liberty, equality and fraternity i.e. with democracy. Inequality, no doubt, exists everywhere in the world. It is due largely to conditions and circumstances. But it never has had the support of religion. With the Hindus it is different. There is not only inequality in Hindu Society but inequality is the official doctrine of the Hindu religion.

## SOCIAL TORY

The Hindu has no will to equality. His inclination and his attitude are opposed to the democratic doctrine of one man, one value. Every Hindu is a social Tory and a political Radical. Mr. Gandhi is no exception to this rule. He presents himself to the world as a liberal but his liberalism is only a very thin veneer which sits very lightly on him as dust does on one's boots. You scratch him and you will find that

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# THUS SPAKE MR. GANDHI-CHAMPION OF CASTE SYSTEM

(The following are but a few utterances of Mr. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (popularly known as 'Mahatma Gandhi') on 'Varnashrama Dharma' (caste system which is a speciality for the tribe called Hindus—Ed)

## CASTE SAVED HINDUISM

"In my opinion, it is not caste that has made us what we are. It was our greed and disregard of essential virtues which enslaved us. I believe that caste has saved Hinduism from disintegration. I consider the four divisions alone to be fundamental, natural and essential .... But I am certainly against any attempt at destroying the fundamental divisions. The caste system is not based on inequality"

"I believe in Varnashram dharma both according to birth and Karma but I do not regard Bhangi (Sweeper) in any sense a low order".

## VARNASHRAM IS SCIENTIFIC

"Varnashram is, in my opinion, inherent in human nature, and Hinduism has simply reduced it to a science. It does attach to birth. A man cannot change his Varna by choice. Not to abide by one's Varna is to disregard the law of heredity".

"Caste system has in my opinion a scientific basis. Reason does not revolt against it".

"Caste has nothing to do with religion. It is a custom whose origin I do not know and do not need to know for the satisfaction of my spiritual hunger."

## REMAIN A SCAVENGER !

"... What I mean is, one born a scavenger must earn his livelihood by being a

scavenger, and then do whatever else he like. For a scavenger is as worthy of his hire as a lawyer or your President. That according to me, is Hinduism".

"That a person creates confusion of caste when he leaves his hereditary calling is obvious. When a Brahmin begins to earn his bread by, say, following the profession of a barber or engineer, he does create confusion of caste, as much as when a barber or an engineer begins to impart religious instructions as a means of livelihood".

## Bhangi ! DON'T LEAVE HINDUISM

"I want to uplift Hinduism. I regard the Untouchables as an integral part of Hindu community. I am pained when I see a single Bhangi driven out of the fold of Hinduism. But I do not believe that all class distinctions can be obliterated".

## INTERMARRIAGE AND INTERDINING

"Marriage is a fall even as birth is a fall. Salvation is freedom from birth and hence death also. Prohibition against intermarriage and interdining is essential for a rapid evolution of soul".

## DIE FOR THE COW !

"Are Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Shudras not to protect the cow? Can anyone remain Hindu without readiness to die for the cow?"

Source : Gandhi and Gandhism,  
by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

# THUS SPAKE DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR- ARCH ENEMY OF CASTE SYSTEM

(The following are a few quotations on Caste System from Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's works—Ed).

As an economic organisation Caste is a harmful institution, inasmuch as, it involves the subordination of man's natural powers and inclinations to the exigencies of social rules.

## HYMN OF HATE

One caste enjoys singing a hymn of hate against another caste as much as the Germans did in singing their hymn of hate against the English during the last war. The literature of the Hindus is full of caste genealogies in which an attempt is made to give a noble origin to one caste and an ignoble origin to other castes.

## CASTE vs ETHICS

The effect of caste on the ethics of the Hindus is simply deplorable. Caste has killed public spirit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible. A Hindu's public image is his caste. His responsibility is only to his caste. His loyalty is restricted only to his caste. Virtue has become caste-ridden and morality has become caste-bound. There is no sympathy to the deserving. There is no appreciation of the meritorious. There is no charity to the needy. Suffering as such calls for no response. There is charity but it begins with the caste and ends

with the caste. There is sympathy but not for the men of other castes.

## CHATUR VARNA

To me this Chaturvarna with its old labels is utterly repellent and my whole being rebels against it.

## INTER-DINING

To agitate for and to organise inter caste dinners and inter caste marriages is like forced feeding brought about by artificial means. Make every man and woman free from the thralldom to the Shastras, cleanse their minds of the pernicious notions founded on the Shastras, and he or she will inter-dine and inter-marry, without your telling him or her to do so.

## INFECTED CHRISTIANITY ETC

Caste is no doubt primarily the breath of the Hindus. But the Hindus have fouled the air all over and every body is infected, Sikh, Muslim and Christian.

## ANCESTRAL CALLING

The Mahatma sees great virtue in a Brahmin remaining a Brahmin all his life. Leaving aside the fact there are many

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underneath his liberalism he is a blue blooded Tory. He stands for the cursed caste. He is a fanatic Hindu upholding the Hindu religion.

### UNTOUCHABILITY. A SPORT

Where could anyone find in India among the Hindus any person with a sense of shame and sense of remorse such as was felt by Jefferson? I should have thought the Hindus would be too ashamed of this stigma of Untouchability on them to appear before the world with a demand for their freedom. That they do clamour for freedom—the pity is that they get support—is evidence that their conscience is dead, that they feel no righteous indignation, and to them Untouchability is neither a moral sin nor a civil wrong. It is just a sport as cricket or hockey is.

### MAKING INDIA SAFE FOR HINDUISM

The friends of Mr. Gandhi will no doubt point to him and his work. But what has Mr. Gandhi done to reform Hindu Society that his work and life be cited by democrats as a witness of hope and assurance? His friends have been informed of the Harijan Sewak Sangh and they continue to ask, "Is not Mr. Gandhi working to uplift the Harijans?" Is he? What is the object of this Harijan Sewak Sangh? Is it to prepare the Untouchables to win their freedom from their Hindu masters, to make them their social and political equals? Mr. Gandhi had never had any such object before him and he never wants to do this, and I say that he cannot do this. This is the task of a democrat

and a revolutionary. Mr. Gandhi is neither. He is a Tory by birth as well as by faith. The work of the Harijan Sewak Sangh is not to raise the Untouchables. His main object, as every self-respecting Untouchable knows, is to make India safe for Hindus and Hinduism. He is certainly not fighting the battle of the Untouchables.

### BUYING HARIJANS

On the contrary by distributing through the Harijan Sewak Sangh petty gifts to petty Untouchables he is buying, benumbing the drawing claws of the opposition of the Untouchables which he knows is the only force that will disrupt the caste system and will establish real democracy in India. Mr. Gandhi wants Hinduism and the Hindu Caste system to remain in tact. Mr. Gandhi also wants the Untouchables to remain as Hindus. But as what? Not as partners but as poor relations of the Hindus. Mr. Gandhi is kind to the Untouchables. But for what? Only because he wants to kill, by kindness, them and their movement for separation and independence from Hindus. The Harijan Sewak Sangh is one of the many techniques which has enabled Mr. Gandhi to be a successful humbug.

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### TO MY FRIENDS

Friends!  
Come out  
by breaking  
the rusted chains of  
blind faith,  
And let your mind  
inhale  
the odour of freedom.

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# DR. AMBEDKAR AND CONVERSION TO BUDDHISM



Dr. W. S. BARLINGAY

From a rational point of view conversions in the past have meant little more than a mere substitution of one set of superstitions for another. In all dogmatic religions, there is a certain system of beliefs and propositions about the nature of reality, which being contrary to science, can be demonstrated to be wrong. All rites and rituals appropriate to a particular dogmatic religion, postulate and assume the truth of some such body of propositions which appear to have not the slightest evidence in support of them.

## CHARVAKA'S INFLUENCE ON BUDDHA

It was the study of Buddhism that gave a new dimension to Dr. Ambedkar's thinking and deepened his insight into the social problems of his country. Dr. Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism in the summer of 1956 at Nagpur is unquestionably a great event in the history of the movement for the upliftment of the Scheduled Classes in this country. Till then that movement was, as it were, a movement for the reform of Hindu religion and society and for the emancipation and upliftment of the lowest castes amongst the Hindus.

Buddhism was really a massive revolt against superstitious beliefs and practices amongst the Hindus. A rational mind like that of the Gautam Buddha could not tolerate the evil practices that were rampant in the Hindu society of those days in the name of religion. There were rumblings of such revolts even before the time of the Buddha. Perhaps Charvaka was one of the first to revolt against such superstitious beliefs and practices. It was characteristic of his way of reasoning to point out that if a goat which is slain in a sacrifice goes to heaven which is supposed to be the end that the performer of the sacrifice aims at, then it would be as well to sacrifice the father of



such performer in that religious rite, so that he could be secured a heavenly abode without any difficulty. Several of the incisive arguments that later reformer of Hinduism have advanced against some of the Hindu rites, customs and beliefs are unquestionably inspired by the relentless reasoning of Carvaka.

### BUDDHA, A RATIONALIST

Both in his method of approach to problems and their solutions, the Buddha was a rationalist and a realist to the core. In the Anguttara Nikaya the Buddha says :

"This I have said to you, O'Kalamas : but you may accept it, not because it is the report, not because it is a tradition, not because it is so said in the past, not because it is given from the Scripture, not for the sake of careful consideration, not for the sake of forbearing with wrong views, not because it appears to be suitable, not because your perceptor is a recluse ; but if you yourself understand that this is so meritorious and blameless, and, when accepted, it is for benefit and happiness, then you may accept it".

### CRITICAL OF SPECULATION

The Buddha is equally critical of more speculative philosophy. He lived in a period "When many professed to have a direct knowledge of God. They tell us with assurance not only whether he is or is not but also what he thinks, wills and does. The Buddha convicts many of them of putting on spiritual airs". In the 'Tevijja Sutta' he declares that the teachers who talk about Brahma have not seen Him face to face. They are like a man in love who cannot say who the lady is, or like one who builds a

staircase without knowing where the place is to be, or like one wishing to cross the river who should call the other side to come to him "Our theories of the Eternal, according to the Buddha, are as valuable as those which a chick which has not broken its way through its shell might form of outside world".

### AMBEDKAR SHUNS DOGMAS

Such being the approach of the Buddha to human problems it is no wonder that a rational and critical mind like that of Dr. Ambedkar which was naturally moving away from Hinduism or for that matter from any dogmatic religion, should be attracted towards Buddhism. For him all dogmatic religions contain a body of propositions about reality which are inconsistent with the discoveries and truth of modern science ; and in so far as this is the case, these propositions must be rejected and with them the dogmatic religions also of which they form an integral part. Buddhism in his view—and I may say quite rightly—was the only religion which realised that religion does not and ought not to depend for its validity on any such dogmas or metaphysical propositions about the nature of reality.

### CASTE UNDEMOCRATIC

There was another reason why Dr. Ambedkar turned away from Hinduism. In his view the very core of Hinduism was Varnashrama Dharma, i.e. religion based on caste and stages in life. The concept of caste was completely opposed to the democratic principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. And what was the justification for retaining caste in modern democratic society. They were not based on any distinctions in Nature at all. It may be that they were a living force in a certain state of Hindu Society and

served men's interest at that stage. But like several other institutions which do not keep pace with a changing environment and consequent social change, conscious or unconscious, they have become mere fossils now and are indeed a dead weight on the more progressive forces and mere hurdles on the path of the development of a healthy society.

### OPPOSED TO EGALITARIANISM

Moreover, once the democratic principle was introduced in our society it was bound to tend towards an egalitarian society socially and economically. Equality in the right to franchise must ultimately tend to the levelling of disparities of every kind. Even a slave, once he is given the right to vote, is not likely to vote for a state of society in which he will be perpetually reduced to the status of an underdog. To quote the prophetic words of Dr. Ambedkar, "On January 26, 1950 we will have equality in politics and inequality in social and economic life. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest moment, or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy."

Dr. Ambedkar was thus quite right in thinking that Hinduism in practice would be an obstacle to healthy social developments and political democracy in this country. This was then another reason why he thought of Buddhism which he rightly considered was very modern in its way of thinking and would be an answer to the social disparities created by Hinduism.

### INTELLECTUAL LABOUR PRICED HIGH

The question, however, is whether mere formal conversion would solve the problem

of social disparities. It seems to me that social disparities, apart from the religious and traditional ones, have a much deeper social origin and that they are embedded in the invidious idea that intellectual labour has a greater intrinsic economic value than mere physical labour. It is difficult even for a modern socialist to think of equating the economic value of intellectual labour with that of more physical labour. It is difficult even for him to imagine that a person who spends an hour in polishing of shoes should be paid the same wages as a lawyer who spends an hour in legal work. That would

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(Continued from page 207)

Brahmins who do not like to remain Brahmins all their lives what can we say about those Brahmins who have clung to their ancestral calling of priesthood? Do they do so from any faith in the virtue of the principle of ancestral calling or do they do so from motives of filthy lucre?

### BRAHMIN PRIEST TO A DEVIL TOO!

A Brahmin can be a priest to Vishnu—the Lord of Love. He can be a priest at Budha Gaya worshipping Buddha—the greatest teacher of mankind who taught the noblest doctrine of love. He also can be a priest to Kali, the Goddess, who must have a daily sacrifice of an animal to satisfy her thirst for blood. He will be a priest of the temple of Rama—the Kshatriya God! He will also be a priest of the Temple of Parshuram, the God who took Avatar to destroy the Kshatriyas! He can be a priest to Brahma, the creator of world. He can be a priest to a Pir whose God Allah will not brook the claim of Brahma to share his spiritual domination over the world!

seem to him very strange indeed and this prejudice is embedded in human beings for ages past.

The fact of the matter is that if we are serious about creating an egalitarian society we must quickly move away from the concept that economic and social value of man has any direct relation to his mental or physical capacity. Whether it is knowledge or physical capacity it must be regarded as being wholly irrelevant to purchasing power of an individual in society.

#### OWNERSHIP, AN OBSTACLE TO FREE THINKING

If modern society suffers from any failure today it is this that it has not been able to create a body of intellectuals who by their thoughts and personal behaviour would prove to be a beacon light to the majority of men.

It is unfortunate that the ordinary intellectual today is after the pursuit of money. He has become a votary of the mammon. He has become completely egocentric forgetting that all that he earns is only a benefit bestowed upon him by the working of the society in which he lives. Money is the product of economic relationship between men in society and has no real existence in nature apart from the working of these social relationship. Dr. Ambedkar rightly pointed out in a different context that "Ownership of property is one of the greatest obstacles in free thinking".

In these circumstances is it strange that Dr. Ambedkar should have thought that a change over to Buddhism and the creation of a modern Sangha on buddhistic lines might solve the crucial problem of the Scheduled Castes? □

#### GOD AND MARRIAGE: STUDENT'S VIEW

Trichur, July 28—In an opinion poll conducted during the recently concluded Agricultural University Youth Festival it was found that while 82 percent of the girl students were firm believers in God, only 69 per cent of the boys believed in the existence of the Almighty. Seventy four per cent of the girls visited their places or worship regularly as against 55 per cent of the boy students. 40 per cent of the girl students and 66 per cent of the boy students are in favour of inter-caste marriages.

THE HINDU: 29-7-1977

#### APARTHEID BOOMERANGS

For two months now no one in Mossel Bay, a small resort in Cape Province (South Africa), has seen a film, be he Black, Coloured or White. For, when the council told the cinema owner that he could sell tickets only to whites, he said there were too few of them to make it profitable and shut the cinema.

# CASTE AND DEMOCRACY IN INDIA

GIAN SINGH BEL

[The author is a lecturer in Government College, Rupnagar, Punjab.]

Ours is an age which is wedded to democracy. Democracy stands for both a democratic state and a democratic society in which everybody is treated equally irrespective of caste, colour or creed. The caste system as prevailing in India is inconsistent with democratic ideals both theoretically and practically.

## DEFINITION

Prof. Blunt defines caste system as "an endogamous group or a collection of endogamous groups, bearing a common name, membership of which is hereditary, imposing

on its members certain restrictions in matters of social intercourse, either following a common traditional occupation or claiming a common origin and generally regarding a forming a single homogeneous community."

By examining this definition, we find that endogamy, absence of change in profession and untouchability (which is the product of these) are the main features of caste-system. Caste system also implies the categorization of Indian society into four rigid castes i.e. Brahmins, Kashtriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. As to the origin of caste system, Yajurveda (31/12) lays down that "The Brahmins were produced from the mouth of God, the Kashtriyas came into being from his arms, from the thighs he produced Vaishyas and the shudras were produced from the feet" and this was also supported by Manu.

## SOCIAL ASPECT

The caste system is the very negation of liberty, equality and fraternity—the basic tenets of democracy. Untouchability is a crime in democracy. But it is still prevailing in many parts of the country. These four castes do not inter-dine nor intermarry. The divine duty of the shudra according to caste system is to serve the first three castes. It is this shudra caste in India which has been ill-treated so far and is still being treated like dumb-driven cattle.

## ECONOMIC ASPECT

Democracy emphasizes economic equality and an egalitarian society. But caste system leaves no means for the 'lower' castes to earn their livelihood and be economically equal to the 'upper' castes. Democracy in modern times is unreal without material advancement and its just distribution. But this material

advancement requires industrial and technological development. This again requires greater social mobility which is not possible in a caste ridden society like India.

### ASCRIBED STATUS

In another way also, casteism is inconsistent with democratic values. Democracy emphasizes ACHIEVED STATUS, the status a person achieves in a society with endeavour. But in a caste-ridden society a person is known by his or her ASCRIBED STATUS the status which is determined on the basis of caste in which he or she was born. That is why in India a member of shudra community is regarded shudra despite his or her enviable prosperity or high official position.

### RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

It was with a wave of nationalism that the caste-system began to loose its grip on Indian society during our national struggle when leaders of all castes began to fight GROWING IMPERIALISM under one banner. Ours is a secular constitution. Untouchability has been abolished under article 17, Right to equality has been granted to all irrespective of caste, colour, creed and moreover lack of change of profession exists no longer.

But these provisions and other measures taken by the Government have not produced the desired results. Harijans are still beaten by higher caste Hindus mercilessly. The heinous incidents which occurred in Ramalpur in Gujarat, in the Panjab and southern states of India recently are an indication.

At the time of distribution of election tickets caste-considerations step in. This intervention of caste into politics has completely polluted electoral process. One of the main tenets of democracy is a clean electoral system. Since caste has entered into politics, this has not been possible. Here again it negates democracy.

### AN ANECDOTE

I have found that even the educated people in offices and other working organisations ridicule the members of Harijan community howsoever intelligent, honest and active they may be. One evening a sardarji possessing an impressive personality and holding a high post at district level met me and asked me my name. He had also met me previously and had shown a warm attitude. I told him my name. His wife asked who were 'BALS'. Her husband replied probably 'JATSIKHS'. I said: 'What is there in these things?' He replied that he had asked me my name only because he wanted to invite me on AKHAND BATH ceremony (a ceremony held after the whole holy book of the Sikhs i.e. "Sri Guru Garanth Sabib" is recited within three days). I was shocked to listen to the views of that votary of SIKH Religion. It implied that only higher castes deserved to assemble at such ceremonies, not the lower ones or untouchables. This is the impact of religion over educated persons.

### SUGGESTIONS

Now let us see the reasons which are contributing to its continuance still. We have not been able to draw the attention of



masses towards the harm this evil has done to our society. Public should be informed of the evils and all those sacred books which preach the system need to be exposed. Another reason is that our secular constitution is being implemented by persons who are not secular in their outlook. Moreover the economic conditions of the weaker sections of the society should be improved. To conclude we can say that there are two

basic methods to eradicate this evil. The first is spread of education, particularly secular education. Second, the statutory provisions made to eradicate this in-human practice must be implemented ruthlessly and unreservedly i.e. every discrimination done owing to one's caste or any offence fanning caste sentiments whether to extract votes or for other purposes must be duly punished.



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(Continued from page 200)

Thus caste is all-pervading and spreads its tentacles almost to every field of activity. What is the way out? In the economic field, every individual should be assured of employment. Socially, inter-caste marriages, an industrial culture and democratising the rural power structure are urgent needs. Politically, parties should concentrate on principles rather than gravitate around personalities. Caste appellations should be dropped while names, marks, language slants, clothing and food habits should cease to be associated with particular caste groups. Religious education should be replaced by teaching of ethics. In short a cosmopolitan Indian culture should take the place of the

present-day caste culture.

It is in this context that we look with concern on attempts in ruling circles to sacrifice secularism in favour of our 'traditional spiritual and moral values as propagated by Tilak, Vivekananda and Gandhi'. Let us tell these short-sighted leaders that people do not need transcendental meditation, ban on cow slaughter or urine therapy. Let them ensure the most fundamental and meaningful of all rights viz. the **RIGHT TO WORK**. This will free the people from the clutches of superstition, fate theory and ignorance. We may still see the blooming of the most enlightened and egalitarian society on earth in our country! Perhaps, we will see some of the best humans amongst us shorn of narrow ideas.



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# News and Notes

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## UNTOUCHABILITY, STILL A DREAM

Disposing a Criminal appeal wherein the dispute climaxed into foul murder motivated by a false-prestige of the pyramidal caste hierarchy, their lordships Mr. S. Natarajan and Mr. S. Rathna Pandian of the Madras High Court observed :

"In spite of the crusade by Gandhiji against untouchability for several decades, and the Constitution guaranteeing equality of status to all citizens, the goal of casteless egalitarian society still remains a dream and it is a sad reflection on caste Hindus, particularly those in the rural areas."

## NEED FOR REAL CHANGE OF HEART

Their Lordships further observed : "Paulraj (The Victim) and members of his family, dubbed as untouchables due to their birth, could not shed their inferiority complex and claim equality of treatment with their fellow beings. The evidence of the witnesses disclosed that when deriding remarks were made by the appellant and his father on the lowness of their birth, they could do nothing in rebuttal, except to curse fate which had given them the parentage of Harijans. The proverbial gap between law and legislation

on the one hand, and hard social realities on the other, was well-illustrated in this case. If the dark chasm was to be bridged and equality among various sections of people was to become a reality there should be full and real change of heart among the so-called higher sections of society and it should be reflected by their ready and willing acquiescence to the changed set-up.

"We hope that before long a society, rid of the age-old social evil of untouchability, will be ushered in and enlightened and compassionate thinking as well as law and legislation will ensure a happy state of affairs".

(Courtesy : "THE HINDU")  
11-8-'77

## GOLD PLATING TEMPLES

The Dewasam Minister of Kerala, Mr. K. K. Balakrishna, said recently that the Kerala Government has sanctioned an additional 60 kg. of gold for plating of the 'Garuvayur' Temple.

The total gold used for the purpose will be 120 kg. which (at the present market rate Rs. 600/- per 10 grams) would work out to

Rs. 72 lakhs. (The investment needed to create a new job in the cottage sector is Rs. 5000/-) This amount would have been enough to create 1400 jobs! The Government which sanctioned the first 60 kg. was led by a Communist, Mr. Achutha Menon and the second 60 kg. by a Congress man, Mr. A. K. Antony! Both have no religious convictions. Still they are compelled to give in! What is the importance of gold plating of a temple in the context of appalling poverty and un-employment?

Courtesy: 'COMMERCE'  
May 27, 1977.

#### A CALL TO J. P.

(The following are excerpts from a letter dated 14-4-77 written by Mr. Y. A. Lokhandwala, President, Bombay Rationalist Association to Mr. Jaya Prakash Narayan. Readers will be advised if and when there is a reply from J.P.)

"Yesternight I heard you conveying your 'Message to the Nation' on Television wherein, at the end, your recourse to 'god' for your good health has stunned me. I am sure the same would have been the effect on the minds of many a thinking person, who would have, like myself, drawn inspiration from your book entitled 'Why Socialism' and your other writings and utterances in the past professing your convictions in Scientific Socialism.

"Today, most of the people in India look to you for guidance and at this very critical juncture your resorting to the propitiation of the mythological and scientifically controversial 'god' is, in my humble opinion, very misleading and harmful to the present as well as future generations of India.

I would be obliged if you could please enlighten the people on this pertinent point."

#### MENSTRUATION BY STONE IDOLS

Kerala Yukthivadi Sangham State Committee in a resolution have deplored the vulgar propaganda by religious men that the stone idol of a Goddess at Changanur Mahadeva Temple had shown the physiological phenomenon of 'Thirupooth' (Menstruation) three times during the last 11 months. A spokesman of the Devaswam Board and another 'veterinary doctor' had justified that report as a normal event. It is reported that the phenomenon is exhibited when the Poojari finds blood stains (mensus blood) in the cloth worn by the idol.

The Committee demand that the Government investigate the event and take necessary action against such antisocial vulgarity and mass-cheating. Dr. P. V. Udaymohan Pillai presided over the meeting. U. Kalanathan, General Secretary of K. R. A. presented the report.

The Committee asked the Government to give clear instructions to the heads of educational institutions not to reject admission to pupils on the ground that the latter have not indicated their religion or caste in admission forms.

U. Kalanathan

#### BENGAL RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION

During the past few weeks a meeting of Rationalists living in and around Calcutta were held at the Kerala Rashmi office. One

of the meetings was attended by Shri S. Ghosh the former President of I.R.A.

It was decided to form an Association in the name of "Bengal Rationalist Association" and Mr. C K K. Menon was authorised to do the preliminary organizational work of the unit.

The meeting also decided to enrol subscribers for the Rationalist magazines, 'YUKTHIWADI' and 'FREETHOUGHT'. The Association requests like minded people to contact them at Kerala Rashmi, 53-C, Free School Street (1st Floor), Calcutta-700016 (Phone: 212057)

T. P. Naliyath, Calcutta.

## RATIONALIST WEDDINGS



Mr. Amritlal and Ms. Kamala whose marriage was reported in our August issue.

While reporting the above marriage, we have inadvertently published the photo of Shri Subash Chandra, member of Bombay Rationalist Association and Smt. Lathy (Nee Joseph) who were married in a rationalist way without any religious ceremonies under the auspices of Bombay Rationalist Association.

*The error is regretted.*

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## AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND AN APPEAL

We are grateful to the following for their generous donations for FREETHOUGHT.

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Readers may be aware that FREETHOUGHT is being published for noble cause and not with profit motive. Unless all the rationalists share the burden, it is difficult for the journal to survive.

Treasurer, I.R.A.

## NEW MEMBERS

We heartily welcome the following New Members.

Membership No.	Name	Place
<b>Life Members :</b>		
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-37	Ms. M. R. Bhatti, M.A.	Bombay (Maharashtra)
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-417	Mr. Asok Kumar	Khopoli (Maharashtra)
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